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ABSTRACT

The theoretical implications of management assessment centers for evaluating headteachers in Great Britain are examined in this paper. Issues in developing informed, objective management assessment are discussed, which involve the following: the educational system's permeable boundaries; the context in which management assessment and development decisions have traditionally been made and delivered; the application of systematic job analysis to the headteacher position; and the benefits and limitations of current assessment and development center practice. Functions of headteacher appraisal are to: (1) identify the head's strengths and weaknesses; and (2) determine current management development requirements. The most effective way to conduct management appraisal is through job analysis and assessment and development center procedure, which takes a research and development approach. In addition, the application of middle range theories to educational management present considerable research opportunities. (Contains 23 references.) (LMI)

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FOCUS ON THE RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT, AND, ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRES FOR HEADTEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT:

A FOCUS ON THE RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT, AND, ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRES FOR HEADTEACHERS

In setting up an Assessment and Development Centre for Headteachers, the crucial nature of informed, objective management assessment becomes apparent.

In turn, issues of substance and concern are raised relating to: the continued permeability of the boundaries of the educational organisation to outside influence and to the proper domain of professional action; the context in which management assessment and management development decisions have been traditionally made and delivered; the application of systematic job analysis to the Headteacher position and the generation of management competences for Headteachers; the benefits and limitations of current Assessment and Development Centre practice, still the most effective way of undertaking objective management appraisal, and for the need continually to improve this practice.

Additionally, issues of considerable research opportunity allied to middle range theory generation in education management are raised as realistic possibilities.

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT:

A FOCUS ON THE RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT, AND, ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRES FOR HEADTEACHERS

INTRODUCTION

My thoughts in writing this paper have been very much influenced by the field, and by the hard-nosed questions which increasingly arise. In asking schools (or LEAs) to commit their scarce resources, it is reasonable to be asked to demonstrate what predictive outcome is likely to follow from (our) involvement. For example, will the Head demonstrably be a better manager, the school a better school?*

Whilst the focus here is on the assessment of the individual Head in order to assess his or her management development needs, one cannot be other than aware of the dependent relationship that necessarily exists with the assessment of management development programmes as such, and their worth, and in turn with the very real question as to what constitutes school effectiveness. These concerns also reflect the very new styles of partnership which are emerging between HE as provider and school, Headteacher, or LEA as customer or client.

I sense increasing objections in the field to categorising those who work in the educational organisation as no more than one further resource variant. It is

also a time when change seems a permanent condition of the educational environment. A clear need consequently exists to bolster and support those individuals who carry the ever increasing burden of work and responsibility, and this support demonstrably has to be seen to be offered.

Given all the changes in schools, and in the rest of the educational sector for that matter, the issue of management features high on the educational agenda. Consequently, the assessment, selection and management development of those occupying key leadership positions in schools become increasingly critical.

This undoubtedly received insufficient attention in the past. For example, Colin Morgan in 1984[1] drew our attention to deficiencies in selection procedures for senior posts in schools. Whilst some improvement in selection has been made, we cannot any longer continue to treat Heads in ways which may have been previously professionally acceptable. It is necessary now to embrace technologies and methodologies relating to assessment, selection and management development, which although widely available, have not hitherto been adopted by the educational sector.

THE PERMEABILITY OF THE BOUNDARIES OF THE EDUCATIONAL ORGANISATION

Where might WE properly look for our ideas?

I have always felt unease with the extreme opinion which would assert that only educationalists should have primacy in **all** matters relating to the educational organisation, and clearly cannot be unhappy that the permeability of the boundaries of the educational system continue to exist. Where this becomes intrusion into the proper province of the professional then it is obviously dysfunctional. However, I have always acted in the belief that we should be open minded and prepared to be influenced by the good practice of others, and in return we should be prepared to share our good practice with them.

It seems self evident to point out that in the intervening years since your last conference there has continued to be an increase in the numbers of (educational) management consultants working with schools and colleges. Harry Gray (1988)[2] provides an excellent orientation to the difficulties and possibilities here. Large consultancy firms still receive contracts from local and national government, their reports still make national headlines, and the Audit Commission has become an integral part of our operational context.

Many highly regarded firms of management consultants make substantial use of the skills of occupational psychologists, yet the work of occupational psychologists does not over the years seem to have featured strongly in the

activities of BEMAS, even though they have always dealt with matters germane to the education manager. For example, to assess management potential, to help organisations construct staff appraisal systems and conduct appraisal; construct recruitment processes and conduct recruitment, and so forth. It also seems that salaries and incentive payments based upon job evaluation may not be too far away from the educational sector. Teams of educational psychologists, in facing up to the full consequences of changes imposed on LEAs are reorientating their focus. Increasingly consideration is being given to movement out of their traditional sphere of operation and into those directly impacting on the education manager. The quality of some of this work is very high (Boxer, 1991; Cooke, 1991; Kelly, 1992)[3]. Needless to say, I personally am not convinced that BEMAS has strong enough links with psychologists. Could not we in BEMAS widen our focus?

I look back at the proceedings of your previous conference and at its excellent papers. However, such is the rate of change that so much of what we in the East London Business School deal with on a day by day basis seems not to be wholly itemised there. For example, only one mention of management competences was reported in those proceedings, yet these presently occupy a considerable proportion of our collective energies.

Hughes[4] and Bolam[5], in two otherwise excellent papers reported in your previous conference proceedings, exemplify my concern, my fear of an inward lookingness. I paraphrase Bolam's concern as "enough external managerialism has been imposed", and ask of Hughes' caution against foreign imports, when

is caution sitting on the fence? It is not an intention to make this seem like carping criticism but to say that richness and variety can come from the informed practice and experience of outsiders. Perhaps the real issue is what constitutes the proper province of the professional educationalist and professional action, how to manage the interface, and what in these circumstances constitutes acceptable and applicable theory. There are of course substantial matters involved in these issues, and many are well highlighted by Eric Hoyle in The Politics of the School, 1988[6].

I personally would welcome more historical perspectives on the development of the Headteacher position of a level of insightfulness of Bernbaum's (1972)[7] much earlier work in order to have a firmer grasp of these issues.

It is one of the central concerns of this paper, that we have learned much and should continue to learn from the informed 'theory' and the practice of other occupational sectors, and from other academic disciplines. Carefully and rigorously applied such work is likely to continue providing us with a rich and innovative framework.

DISSATISFACTION WITH EXISTING EDUCATION MANAGEMENT THEORY

The nature of concern is a proper desire for theories of education management which will have **predictive** value, but in my view such theory, if it does exist, will do so within an overarching intellectual context of generic theory, perhaps (perhaps not) restated to provide an educational focus.

I feel dissatisfaction with existing educational management theory, which seems essentially descriptive. It provides an intellectually elegant account of what is the case but I do not know what follows from it. I seem to be challenged in the field with matters that relate to face validity, concurrent validity, predictive validity, and the like.

Existing theory does not help with these issues. Hard pressed, it is necessary to demonstrate to equally hard pressed colleagues in LEAs, schools and colleges that one consultant's or HE provider's approach to management development will yield different or the same results from that of another. Surely it is time that we could provide some minimal framework or theoretical construction to begin the first steps of understanding how to provide answers to the proper questions of our hard pressed colleagues.

It is here that my dissatisfaction with previous theorising becomes most apparent. To resolve some of the difficulties I would naturally turn to my comfort in working with the field, to incrementalism which is taken to mean testing out each step before proceeding to the next step, and to that all embracing framework which gives intellectual licence to this approach; that is, grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967)[8]. It is not a framework which necessarily would suit all, but does offer an immediate attraction of enabling the first steps in theory building to be taken in a collaborative relationship with client practitioners.

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1 (This paper does not deal with the detail of operational matters of management development as such, the complexity of these operational issues, of their evaluation, their politicisation, the way in which the adoption, enhancement and success of management development policy has to become an integral part of the senior management team's own policy and practice to be successful, all are admirably dealt with by Lawrence, 1991; and Alexander, 1991)[9].

To exemplify the theoretical issues of interest here, the central concerns as stated earlier, are those problems relating to the diagnosis of, the determining of, the appraisal of, whatever the term that yields objective concerted systematically applied action, firstly to provide a decision identifying a particular Head's strengths or deficiencies against an agreed set of management competences, and secondly, determining with that Head, their current management development requirements. This process is referred to as management assessment,.

THE BACKGROUND OF OPERATIONAL ACTION

The previous educational system minimally managed its personnel satisfactorily enough for most eventualities. It hired staff, paid salaries and pensions, staffed schools, inducted probationers, etc., and delivered an educational service to those for whom it held responsibility. That previous LEA was however less good at handling across the board career progression and management development (Lyons, 1981)[10], and did not cope rapidly enough with (then) newly emerging issues, e.g. equal opportunities, health and safety, the impact of labour law on the education system (Lyons and Stenning, 1985, 1986)[11].

More recently, the LEA, allied to Department for Education initiatives, was providing significant steps towards resolving long standing unreconciled issues regarding management development for senior staff in schools. Whilst larger higher education organisations can and will continue to handle their own staff

management policies and practices, the dismemberment of the LEA leaves the future and the conduct of systematic management development unclear, and causes the individual school and individual member of staff acute difficulty in progressing promotion policies and succession planning.

However, attention to staff and management development will certainly receive even more attention throughout the 1990s. This is so because expectations for changes in schools and in the education of children, require changes in staff and managerial performance. Strains upon resources will continue to focus attention upon school management, and government will continue to pursue policies relating to accountability and efficiency. Those who manage schools will be expected to conduct change in a rational manner and carry out orderly development in the schools. In this process it will be necessary to identify and measure current and needed levels of management performance and relate measures of performance to important organisational variables.

Bolam (1990)[12], in his review of the management and development of staff, poses the basic question: what constitutes effective school management, for this must be the context against which effective management performance is judged? He poses a framework which includes sub-questions to include: school type, role, career, gender and race. Saunders (1987)[13], along with Bolam, treat questions of management assessment as being "usually associated with staff development schemes in individual schools .... and in particular LEAs." Referring to work in managerial assessment Bolam, in particular, characterises it as "diverse and occasionally somewhat idiosyncratic." In this

sense, assessment has not been seen as one stage towards theory building, or contributing to research, but rather as a tool for assessing the immediate effects of specific staff development activities. If managerial assessment is as important a function contributing towards education change and in the improvement of school operation, as it now appears to be, it deserves to be given careful scrutiny and the study of it integrated with the study of other important management functions of schools.

It is the intention to offer a conception of management assessment and relate it to staff and management development, indicate contributions which management assessment can make to theory, research and practice, and illustrate this with evidence from work in management assessment in which we at ELBS and our Headteachers Assessment and Development Centre are currently involved.

RATIONALE FOR A UNIFIED APPROACH TO MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT APPRAISAL

It is necessary to set a context for the explication of management development to be made in order to understand its interrelationship with management appraisal. The circumstances which have shaped current concerns about staff and management development are generally known by those of us who consider ourselves to be educationalists. Apart from recent work by the School Management Task Force[14], management assessment has not received the sustained serious consideration it merits in terms of what is already known about the importance of managerial leadership to indices of school

effectiveness. Whilst being aware of the criticisms which have been made of them, the studies, Fifteen Thousand Hours by Rutter and associates (1979)[15], and that much earlier work by HMI, Ten Good Schools (1977)[16], had dramatically focused a spotlight upon the key role of the Head. There may be many reasons for the neglect, which includes an inadequate structure for career long development opportunities, a lack of resources to implement sound programmes, and not least, a lack of adequate theory and research, properly guided by informed policy and implemented in practice. It is a real fear that in the existing climate of resource constraints and competitive bids to work with schools, the development of theory via sustained relationships with schools will be vitiated by cost when the ethos of prioritised short term training requirements becomes the extant and dominating influence.

However, leadership in and overall responsibility for, management development has always presented a confusing picture within the maintained school context. The individual LEA has responsibilities as do the individual Headteacher, and therefore the school. Additionally, our system has traditionally placed substantial responsibilities on the individual and this I believe to be still a dominant feature. Recent initiatives by the (then) DES are of course extremely welcome but do not resolve the confused picture alluded to above, and we now of course have responsibilities placed in the hands of Governors. This suggests an extraordinarily rich area for research.

One can conceptualise (staff) management development as an arena of professional interest comprised of:

(1) substantive concerns – both theoretical and research;

(2) socio-political concerns – policy making and resource allocation;

(3) technical professional concerns – planning and conduct of development activities.

It is then possible to allocate roles to politicians (policy makers), to practitioners (teachers), and to academics. All would function in the different domains but all have different roles within these domains. The question then becomes: what is the proper balance in any one set of circumstances?

There are reasons to argue that, at this time, the three parts are out of balance, with the socio-political part dominating, the technical professional part in somewhat of a vacuum, and the substantive part being detached from both policy making and technical professional practice. The fear is that with the erosion of the responsibilities of the LEA and sustained decrease in the resource base, the parts are increasingly likely to stay out of balance, if for no other reason than that there is a lack of a mechanism to bring them together.

If management development is to become a significant influence in education, the three parts (substantive, socio-political and technical professional) need to be brought into balance and interrelated. The knowledge base, which is the substantive concern, must be commonly shared, understood, and believed by policy makers on the one hand and practitioners on the other. This is to say that conceptions of research need to be broadened to forms of inquiry that are directly rooted in practice, with results that are directly applicable to practice

and with data that are useful for policy making. I see no other way of seriously influencing and affecting policy makers.

Currently, management development is based upon data obtained from management assessment at either LEA or individual school levels when management development is based upon hard evidence at all. In the future it is increasingly likely that assessment will be undertaken on a school by school basis through self evaluation techniques, through Headteacher appraisal, more arguably through Headteacher mentoring. In the circumstances which will rapidly prevail there is a real need to have the means to examine questions relating to the appropriateness of assessment methods and standards, external validity of assessment results, uses of assessment results for determining needs for managerial development programmes, and for predicting managerial performance for selection and promotion purposes. There is also the need to generate a data base from which research questions may be pursued.

Probably the best means available to accomplish this is through Job Analysis and Assessment and Development Centre procedure. This provides substantial underpinning to management appraisal representing complementary methodologies which have a sustained background of development and use in most non educational occupational sectors.

JOB ANALYSIS

This is the first essential rigorous and systematic step in producing the criteria which are later to be the basis upon which assessment decisions will be made. It is necessary to examine the critical and essential aspects of the current job: e.g. task definition, criteria of success; analysis of skills; changes in task or in organisation. The focus can be upon job, task, or upon personal skills, and preferably upon all.

The best practice is likely to be a multi-technique approach that focuses upon job holders, their peers, their subordinates and superordinates. It is therefore necessary that a sample is rigorously constructed. The examination of professional literature, past job analyses, documentation such as job descriptions, self report, use of structured questionnaires, visits, observations, a number of forms of interview, all are involved to gain a clear picture of the job. These techniques will lead to the aggregation and identification of tasks, objectives and skills or attributes, and computer analysis may be used to weight these against a range of criteria: time on task, perceived importance, frequency of occurrence, freedom to structure, impact of error, etc. The outcome identifies generalised behaviours. The approach should be bolstered and underpinned by Critical Incident Analysis, originally devised by Flanagan (1954)[17], by Repertory Grids, and school visits. Needless to say, in our experience Heads who participate in the process find it stimulating and rewarding and a staff development activity in its own right.

The process enables job specific management competences to be derived which are relevant to the 'current' job. By competence is meant the possession of knowledge, skills or other attributes, and personal characteristics, which are needed to perform a generic managerial role. That is, it provides criteria for the assessment of satisfactory performance: demonstrating what an individual Head in a given role needs to be able to do. The information produced in this way has necessarily to be systematically initially validated with Headteacher groups to ensure that it has face and concurrent validity since there is no other way to have credibility with Heads and to provide a responsible service to the sector. In the longer term predictive validity has to be sought and demonstrated.

Whilst relevance to the current job is a key issue, what emerges is a powerful data base, which in experienced hands, may be used to build views of what the job might be.

THE ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRE PROCESS

The Assessment and Development Centre is the vehicle by which management appraisal decisions are made, typically for selection purposes or, to identify management potential or, management development needs. It is not so much a place as a process. Individuals have an opportunity to participate in a series of simulations which resemble what they would expect to be called upon to do in their work.

The Assessment Centre uses multiple assessment techniques. Trained Assessors decrease chances of subjectivity and partiality, and separately from the exercises, they reach an overall consensus decision on each participant.

The dimensions or criteria of the Assessment Centre are produced through a rigorously conducted job analysis, and the demonstration of content validity is a necessary first step before progressing to empirical validation of the Assessment Centre process. To date the Assessment Centre process has proved the best available means for predicting job performance.

Participant Heads are not assessed against each other but against objective criteria derived from the job. In this sense, a participant does not fail an Assessment and Development Centre, but is provided with a profile showing degree of fit to each criteria. An Assessment and Development Centre is offered to Heads and Deputies who are already in post and would enable Heads to formulate their management development requirements, or identify for Deputies areas where they should seek to improve their skills.

The Assessment and Development Centre, to date, has proved to be a highly successful method for selection, or management development decision making, and to predict successful job performance (Schmitt et al, 1984[18]; McCleary and Ogawa, 1989[19]).

Whilst the original techniques apparently can be traced to officer selection by the British Armed services, the real watershed to its widespread use can be traced to the American Telephone and Telegraph Company. Here an operational follow up study to their Assessment and Development Centre usage determined that those managers achieving the highest ratings on the

Assessment and Development Centre were those subsequently receiving the most promotion (Bray and Grant, 1966[30]).

The participants of our Assessment and Development Centre complete aptitude tests and a personality inventory, undertake a range of specially constructed job related validated simulations, and a criterion related interview. Specially trained Assessors would agree an aggregated rating for each participant on each criterion. Our full Centre would take place over a day and a half and allows maximum scope for interaction between participants and Assessors. As it contains important elements of self evaluation, and one to one feedback on completion of each stage, it is seen as essentially cumulative and designed to maximise interaction between Assessors and participants. On the final half day the participants interview each other as part of the self-evaluation process.

The final stage to the Assessment Centre involves a one to one discussion with each participant of their final written profile. The written profile is produced from the objective ratings of the trained Assessors. This has to be fused together with the participant's own self evaluation to form the basis of their management development programme. The process is thus essentially bottom-up and participatory and not top-down and imposed.

The criteria and competences we use are derived from the job analysis of the Head's current job. These competences essentially relate to senior managerial performance and are categorised as personal transferable skills. It is the descriptors to these competences which give the performance dimensions their

school properties, separating them from generic competences, enabling us to rate the participants, determine degrees of relevance and fit between school sectors, as well as between schools of differing ethos.

It follows that to be of continued demonstrable relevance in today's state of rapid change in education, the job analysis and management competences must be constantly updated and uprated.

JOB ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRES: PRACTICAL AND RESEARCH POTENTIAL

Job analysis in providing statements of what a manager needs to be able to do, permits the preparation of a discrepancy analysis of ratings. Ratings are norm based and referenced against significant context variables: school sector; size; location; and so forth. Job analysis provides a powerful tool to aid individuals with the preparation of a management development programme, but has potentially equally rewarding usage when the viewpoints of different actors are taken into account - Chair of Governors, or, teaching and non teaching staff in a school, provide an example.

Ratings against a norm referenced data base can provide one means to generate, for research purposes, 'desirable profiles' and also provide a very useful check against what may prove the waywardness of self evaluation.

In this sense the Assessment and Development Centre becomes a powerful tool in the hands of trained and experienced assessors since good performers who

may not match all 'norms' may be identified for the contexts in which they could operate successfully, thus becoming the basis for imaginative and creative action. With a sound enough data base it becomes possible to put forward propositions of not just what the job is, but what it can be, and perhaps more arguably, what it ought to be. It therefore becomes a vehicle for generating hypotheses which can be turned into field based research.

The Assessment and Development Centre approach to the assessment of managerial behaviour is derived from middle range theories of organisational leadership. Previous definitions with a high level of generality, such as the initiating structure/showing consideration dimensions, of the Guba model, or the concern for production/concern for people dimensions of the Blake and Mouton grid, prove to be at too high a level of abstraction. The same is true of a highly specific job analysis procedure which describes specific positions in specific situations, at specific points in time. High specificity does not lead to the specification of competences that apply generally or are transferable.

As with middle range theories of leadership, middle range specification of competences have proved to be practical to develop and useful for individual assessment. The taxonomy of competences need to be broad enough to capture the relevant managerial behaviour, yet be useful in specific situations. There are sufficient theoretical and empirical grounds to proceed with developmental work. First, theory and related research indicate that common leadership functions exist across organisations. Second, studies have demonstrated discriminate validity; that is, factor analysis studies have shown

that competences can be differentiated one from another and also that the presence, or absence, of a competency can be confirmed by other measures (Schmitt, 1982[21]).

An Assessment and Development Centre that is carefully designed and validated can become a powerful research tool as well as being useful in practical situations. Neither training programmes nor assessment systems can be planned and conducted without attention to competence; that is, what the manager is to be able to do after training or what he/she should be doing on the job. Even when competences are carefully and explicitly specified via local survey, ratings, and the like, external checks should be made using an unbiased, external system. In such cases, the Assessment and Development Centre can provide that check effectively.

The research opportunities appear to be almost endless. Theoretical propositions can be examined about managerial assessment, the match of job requirements with individual competences and criteria; differences between successful managers by levels, types of schools, etc; measure of school effectiveness related to competences; and a host of other issues.

However, research and development into the practice of the Assessment and Development Centre as such is equally necessary, for no Assessment and Development Centre can be better than the research and development underpinning it, and the performance of its Assessors. Whilst it certainly is one of the more powerful research and development tools available in the field

of human resource management, it certainly does have its problems and its critics.

One must look at how to improve the Assessment and Development Centre to make it more accurate, resource and cost effective, to explore further elements of subjectivity still present in consensus decision making, to be more user friendly and for there to be less of an artificial gap between the school as work place and the Assessment and Development Centre. Criticism, which is levelled at Assessment and Development Centre practice asserting that meaning is lost by breaking the Headteacher's job, tasks and responsibilities into discrete categories, and which, if reassembled, do not equal the whole, and also, that the assessment and development process will rapidly become little more than a self-fulling prophecy, must be treated with respect. The context in which it is determined that an individual should attend a Centre, the ownership of the profile and what should properly occur subsequent to a Centre, are matters which also need careful examination. However, following Iles (1989)[22], if the sample population captures a cultural distortion, e.g. a male model of management, then there are certainly problems to resolve.

The Assessment and Development Centre remains by far the most accurate method available to us for making assessment and the consequent development decisions. As such it is a powerful instrument in pursuit of the delivery of equal opportunities policies since it can counter bias towards ethnic minorities and women, which may be encountered in other assessment and development methods, e.g. in interviews.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Management appraisal within the schools sector and with particular reference to the Headteacher's position, is perplexingly a much neglected area of research. It is the key process upon which a Head's management development is constructed. The most effective means yet devised of conducting management appraisal is via the assessment centre process. However, the intellectual underpinning to the process has been and continues to be explored and has largely been developed in the context of the academic field of Occupational Psychology. BEMAS hitherto seems to have ignored the fullness of this academic tradition.

I would hope that not by reinventing the wheel, but by selectively borrowing from good practice in other occupational sectors and accepting that the boundaries of the education system are permeable, we can more quickly give solid and needed support to our colleagues, and at the same time add to theory. A research and development approach to job analysis and to systematic management appraisal conducted through Assessment and Development Centre techniques opens up the real agenda of validity. The problem of predictive validity at least begins to be subject to systematic scrutiny. Whilst answers are not immediately available, the problems can be scrupulously and cumulatively addressed, the essence of middle range theory building.

However, I am more than mindful in making these remarks of the reservation and caution urged, some years ago now, by William Taylor (1976)[23] as to the limitations of managerial action and, advising managers against their rushing

headlong to resolve problems of human behaviour which have troubled philosophers for some thousand years.

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